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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 000489

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/06/2013

TAGS: [IZ](#) [IT](#) [PREL](#) [IRAQI](#) [FREEDOM](#)

SUBJECT: TAREQ AZIZ TO MEET THE POPE AND ITALIAN OFFICIALS
FEB. 14

REF: VATICAN 483

CLASSIFIED BY: POLITICAL MINISTER-COUNSELOR THOMAS COUNTRYMAN FOR REASON 1.5 (B) AND (D)

1. (U) THIS IS AN ACTION REQUEST. PLEASE SEE PARAGRAPH 3.

2. (C) CESARE RAGAGLINI, FM FRATTINI'S CHIEF OF STAFF, INFORMED POL MC THAT TAREQ AZIZ IS SCHEDULED TO VISIT THE VATICAN AND CALL ON THE POPE FEB. 14 (REF.) THE IRAQI INTEREST SECTION IN ROME HAD ALREADY CALLED THE MFA SEEKING OFFICIAL GOI APPOINTMENTS, SAID RAGAGLINI, AND THE GOI'S INITIAL THOUGHT WAS TO HAVE AZIZ MEET WITH FM FRATTINI IN ORDER TO SEND THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE MESSAGE ON IRAQ TO AZIZ IN PERSON AND SUBSEQUENTLY IN A COMMUNIQUE. RAGAGLINI ALSO MENTIONED THAT AZIZ WOULD CERTAINLY SEEK TO MEET OPPOSITION LEADERS WHO ARE AGAINST THE WAR AS WELL AS SOME CATHOLIC POLITICIANS WITHIN THE GOVERNING COALITION WITH WHOM HE HAS HAD LONG CONTACTS.

3. (C) POL MC SAID THAT THE STRONGEST POSSIBLE MESSAGE TO IRAQ WOULD BE FOR THE MFA TO REFUSE TO SEE AZIZ ALTOGETHER BUT UNDERSTOOD THAT WAS DIFFICULT SINCE ITALIAN PUBLIC OPINION WOULD NOT UNDERSTAND THE REFUSAL OF THE GOI TO TALK TO AZIZ. POL MC PROMISED TO CHECK IF THE DEPARTMENT HAD ANY MESSAGE FOR THE GOI TO COMMUNICATE TO AZIZ, BUT SAID THAT THE DEPARTMENT WOULD PROBABLY NOT OFFER AN OPINION ON WHO IN THE GOI OUGHT TO MEET AZIZ.

SEMBLER

2003ROME00489 - Classification: CONFIDENTIAL